



NEXT GENERATION
SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

AN INITIATIVE OF INC

TRAINING MANUAL

About Institute for Networked Communities (INC)



The Institute for Networked Communities (INC) is the national organization that developed and scaled the Next Generation Sector Partnership model. INC's mission is to build stronger, more inclusive economies by activating public-private networks around a shared commitment to place. Over the last decade, we have worked in over 100 regions in 20+ states around the country to launch and sustain Next Gen Sector Partnerships. This training manual is a product of experimentation and lessons learned from on-the-ground experience in those communities as well as from national experience across the fields of sector strategies and regional economic and workforce development. Our training manual and toolkit is continually updated to reflect ongoing learning and evolution of the Next Gen Sector Partnership model.



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Introduction: Why This, Why Now?

What does it take to build prosperous communities? What makes the difference between places where opportunity is expanding and those where opportunity is waning? The success of every region across the country depends on the answer to two critical questions: first, are businesses thriving and creating quality jobs? Second, can people access those quality jobs by getting the right education and training at the right time? A community's ability to stabilize or grow its local economy and prepare people for opportunity depends on how it responds to these two questions.

Next Gen Sector Partnerships offer a way to simultaneously tackle these challenges. They harness the passion of forward-thinking business leaders to grow good jobs and build stronger education and training systems, working in partnership with a coordinated team of public partners in education, workforce development and economic development.

Sound familiar? It probably does. In every community there are lots of efforts to build partnerships with businesses. In fact, in every region, a myriad (sometimes dozens) of educational institutions, workforce development programs and economic development organizations reach out to businesses in an effort to understand their needs through surveys, focus groups, skills panels or advisory boards. They spend many hours and public resources engaging with companies (whom they more commonly refer to as “employers”), and yet only ever touch a small subset of companies in their region. Because these efforts operate independently of one another, they fail to engage a true critical mass of business leaders and, over time, business participation wanes. This leaves public partners forced to develop programs with incomplete information on what industry really needs. Without an engaged group (at some critical mass level) of business leaders working to closely align education and training with industry needs, students are forced to roll the dice, hoping that their training will lead to a job and a career.

Next Gen Sector Partnerships offer an alternative approach, aligning multiple workforce development, education and economic development efforts to build sustainable, industry-led partnerships that strengthen regional economies and align education and training systems with the needs of industry.

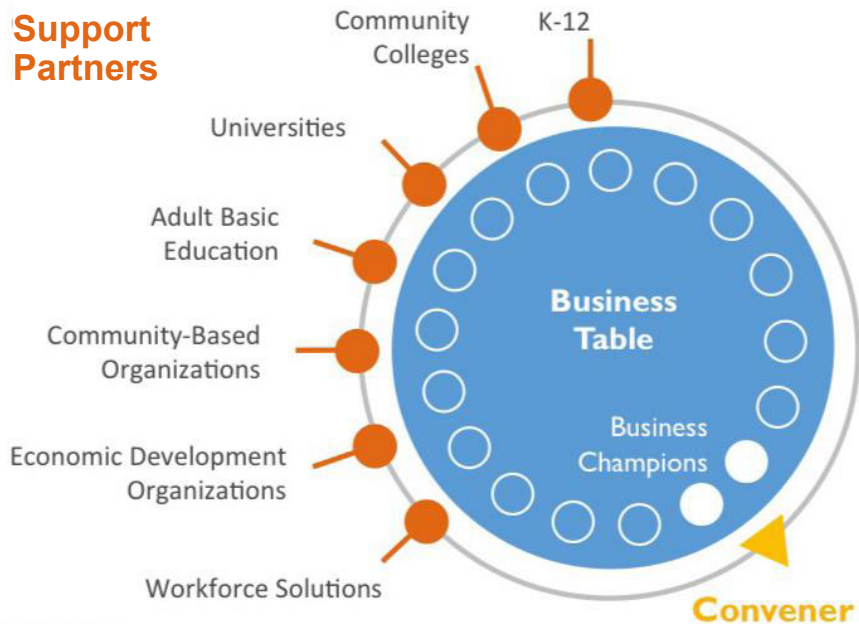
Now, more than ever, is the time to push for deeper and more strategic partnerships. Why is this so important now?

- **Business leaders** in today's competitive economy recognize that building a strong talent pipeline and creating the conditions for long-term competitiveness requires collaboration—with industry peers and with educators, workforce developers and economic developers.
- **Educational institutions** at the secondary and post-secondary levels are being called to engage with industry and align their curriculum and programming in new, innovative ways.
- **Workforce Development Boards** are being called upon to increase partnerships with industry and align workforce development with economic development through federal legislation (WIOA).
- **Economic development organizations** are experiencing a renewed interest in talent and skills as keys to economic vitality.

WHAT ARE NEXT GEN SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS?

They are partnerships of companies from the same industry in a shared labor market region, that work with education, workforce development, economic development and community organizations to tackle common needs of the targeted industry. They primarily focus on the education and workforce training needs of an industry, but Next Gen partnerships also focus on other issues related to an industry's competitiveness. This ensures deeper, broader and longer-term industry engagement.

INDUSTRY-DRIVEN, COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED SECTOR PARTNERSHIP



HOW ARE NEXT GEN PARTNERSHIPS DIFFERENT?

- **The agenda is driven entirely by business leaders (vs being set by the requirements of a grant or public program).** Business leaders define the priorities they want to tackle together based on the unique needs of their industry. This almost always includes workforce development issues (e.g. career awareness, aligning training with industry needs, expanding work-based learning) but often includes broader competitiveness needs (e.g. infrastructure improvements, technology adoption, supply chain coordination, or business-to-business networking). Since business leaders define the agenda, they are more likely to stay involved for the long haul.
- **Business leaders craft their own solutions (vs providing input only).** In Next Gen partnerships, business leaders personally champion priorities and lead action teams that drive results. Public partners play a supportive role, bringing resources to business-led teams, but they stay in the back seat while business drives. This ensures that the partnerships are sustainable and action-oriented.
- **They are supported by a broad-based team of public partners (vs being driven by a single program or system).** Next Gen Partnerships are a team effort. They depend on a broad-based support team made up of education, workforce development and economic development leaders who collaborate to support the partnership and use the partnership as the go-to, shared table to respond to industry's needs. They are not a special initiative or a passing fad; they are a long-term way of doing business and working together across programs and systems.



WHO'S INVOLVED?

Next Gen Sector Partnerships are industry-driven and community-supported:

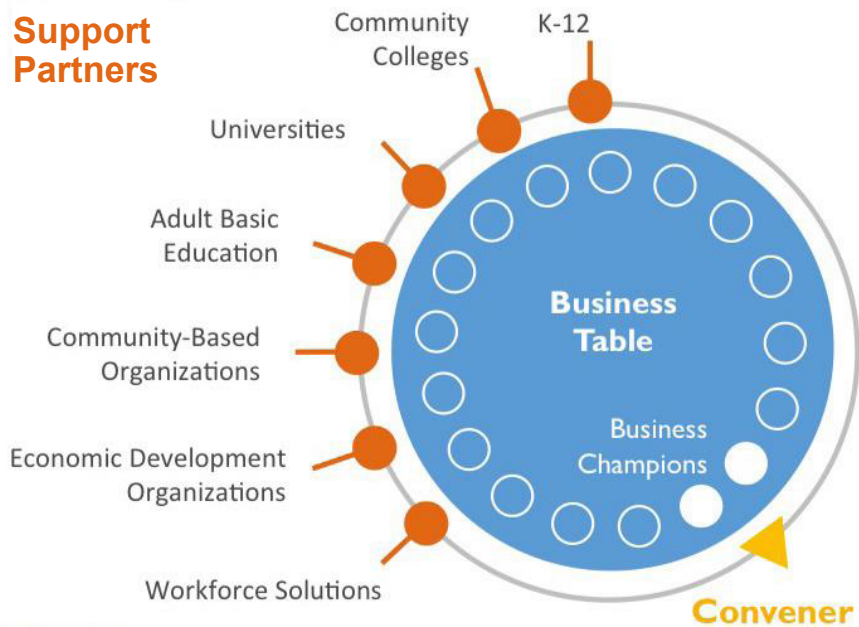
- **Business members** of a target industry make up an *inner* table. This is where businesses shape and drive an agenda, one that has a heavy (but not exclusive) workforce & education component;
- **Support partners** from the community, including decision-makers from the workforce system (workforce development boards, Job Centers, Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Education, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, etc.), education (including K-12, Career and Technical Education, community and technical colleges, and 4-year institutions), community based training organizations, apprenticeship programs, as well as key economic development organizations and Chambers of Commerce, and other stakeholders, make up an outer table. They are the essential team of organizations that implement, with industry, the needed solutions and interventions to keep the industry strong and to get people jobs.

INTENDED AUDIENCE FOR THIS TRAINING MANUAL

The Audience for this step-by-step guide is primarily the set of “support partners” (leaders from workforce development, education, community and economic development organizations) necessary to make an industry-led partnership successful. This curriculum is ideally used in a team setting, i.e. among members of a regional “support partner team” so that everyone is building skills and making joint decisions together about their critical target sectors and how they coordinate shared Next Gen sector partnerships. Business champions and partnership members will also glean a tremendous amount of information from this guide. We hope this guide gives public and business partners alike the confidence they need to build partnerships together.

Module 1

INDUSTRY-DRIVEN, COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED SECTOR PARTNERSHIP



Module 1: The Step-by-Step Process of Building Next Gen Sector Partnerships

DEFINITIONS AND CORE PRINCIPLES

Next Gen Sector Partnerships are partnerships of companies, *from the same industry and in a shared labor market region*, who work with education, workforce development, economic development and community organizations. They primarily focus on the education and workforce training needs of an industry, but Next Gen Partnerships also focus on other issues related to an industry’s competitiveness. This ensures deeper, broader and longer-term industry engagement.

They are led by a critical mass of business leaders from the targeted industry who make up the “inner table.” These business leaders literally drive the discussion (in initial meetings, support partners sit around the outside of the room in “listen-only” mode) and set the agenda, identifying common priorities for action that impact the overall success of the sector. Business members of a Next Gen Sector Partnership ideally: 1) are decision-makers in their businesses (C-Suite); 2) have a passion for their industry and see opportunities for businesses to collaborate, and; 3) believe that the success of their business is related to the success of their community. See [How to Identify Industry Champions](#) for more.

They are supported by a team of support partners that includes decision-makers from the workforce system (workforce development boards, Job Centers, Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Education, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, etc.), education (including K-12, Career and Technical Education, community and technical colleges, and 4-year institutions), community based training organizations, apprenticeship programs, as well as key economic development organizations and Chambers of Commerce, and other stakeholders.



They are supported by an active convener (or two organizations operating as co-conveners) that serves as a neutral, third party providing backbone support to the partnership. The convener plays a critical role in coordinating meetings, recruiting business leaders and public partners to contribute to the partnership, communicating regularly, and facilitating meetings to keep the partnership focused and on-track. Next Gen Sector Partnerships can be convened by workforce development boards, an economic development organization, a community college, a community-based organization, or a combination of these. It is essential, however, that the decision about who serves as convener is made *jointly* by the full

WHAT WORKS WELL (AND NOT SO WELL)

Clusters of companies	Individual firms
Employers as partners	Employers as customers
Industry-driven	System- or institution-driven
Regionally-based	Statewide top-down or too local
Existing industry strength or emerging specialty	Wishful thinking
Industry competitiveness/growth	Workforce only
Opportunity-focused	Problem-driven
Employer priorities first	Target populations first
Champion-driven	Representation-oriented
Coalitions of the willing	The futile search for consensus
People and relationships	Organizations and jurisdictions
A disciplined, replicable process	A mysterious, unique occurrence

support team. This ensures that the partnership is broadly-supported and not overly dependent on (or controlled by) any one organization. See the [Convener Job Description](#) for more.

They address the shared workforce and broader competitiveness needs of the targeted industry. The agenda of Next Gen Sector Partnerships is defined by business leaders and focused on issues that no single company could address on their own but that impact the overall success of the industry. Almost all sector partnerships focus on workforce development issues (i.e. short-term training, consortia training, incumbent worker training, career pathway systems-building, coordinating and scaling work-based learning, improving HR practices, hire-local campaigns, career awareness campaigns etc.) but they focus on broader economic development issues as well (i.e. shared marketing and branding of the region and industry, supply chain mapping and coordination, shared transportation costs, infrastructure improvements, regulatory or permitting process streamlining, business-to-business networking).

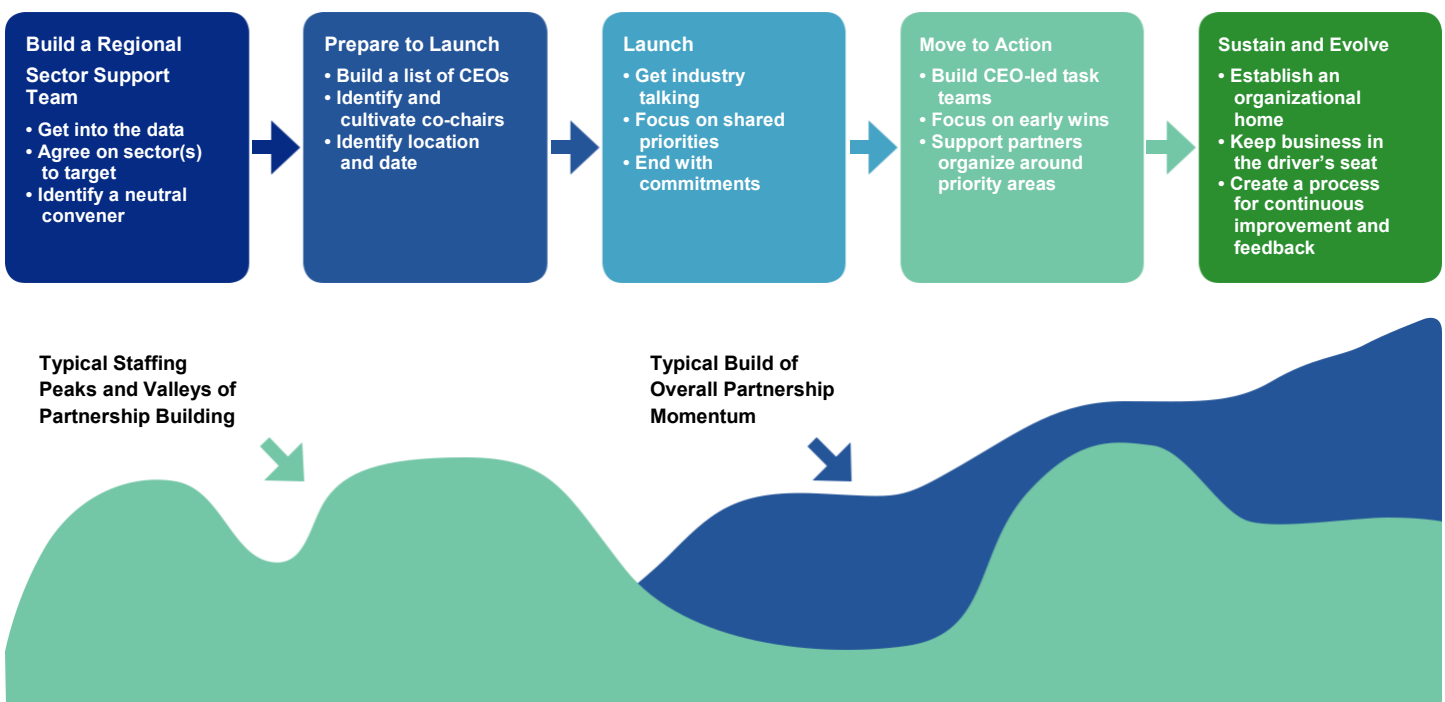
Frequently Asked Questions

How do you define the scope of a target industry? Is it really okay to prioritize industries? How big is too big? How small is too small? Doesn't this conflict with a needed focus on target worker populations? Does this really work in rural areas? Aren't metro areas just too complex for this type of model? How does all of this align with coordinated business service efforts? What about career pathway programs? What about realistic expectations of staffing up a good partnership? So many questions! [Click here for answers to FAQs.](#)

LIFECYCLE/BIORHYTHM OF A NEXT GEN SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

There are natural ebbs and flows of building a sustained Next Gen Sector Partnership. These align with the inherent intensities of building a comprehensive “community support team” who will be poised and ready to help implement the priority actions and solutions areas that an industry group identifies as important. The ebbs and flows also apply to the process of building the team of companies ready to partner together. It is important to understand when commitments of time and resources might be more concentrated over the life cycle of a partnership, and when you might feel like the partnership is finally chugging along. The Lifecycle and Biorhythms graphic below is another way to understand this.

Life Cycle and Biorhythms of Industry-led Sector Partnerships

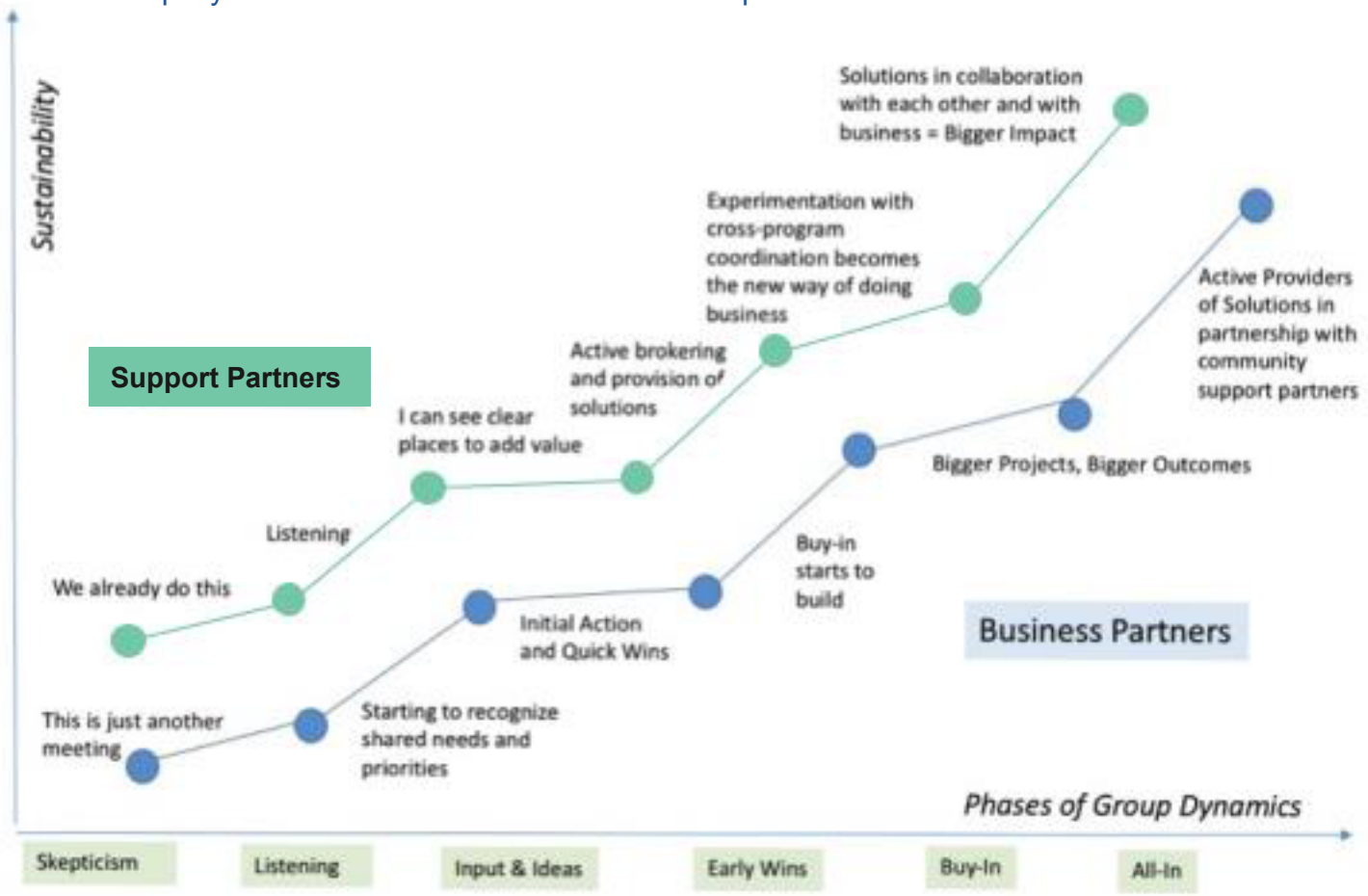


It may surprise you that the most intense staffing and energy is needed in the first step of partnership-building: creating a true regional sector support team. Making the case that the single best employer engagement strategy is in fact public program coordination and then taking concrete steps to achieve such coordination is hard. This is messy, and no one truly has the authority to bring partners on the ground together (e.g., not a workforce area director, a college dean, nor a Chamber president). Catalyzing the coming together of a regional team of these stakeholders and facilitating toward agreement about common target industries is a break-through in and of itself. Agreeing to clear roles and responsibilities to formally coordinate support for those target industries is another huge win, and the point-of-entry to sector partnership building.

From there, following good process, recruiting industry champions to help set up the official “launch” of an industry partnership, inviting companies to attend, and facilitating them to an industry-driven action agenda can, quite honestly, be straightforward. Post-launch, staffing requirements pick back up. Ideally, your industry group identified between 2 to 5 areas for action, most being workforce and education related, but some focusing on other issues (like transportation, technology or needed policy changes). It’s the convener’s (or co-conveners’) role to now plug the “support team” in appropriately to start moving into implementation. Using a workgroup or action team structure here is important. Each priority area should be an action team initially composed of industry members, facilitated by a trusted convener or support partner, and over time supported by public partners. See [Building and Sustaining Action Teams](#) for more.

This begins the real “norming” phase of a Next Gen Partnership, where both public and private partners are learning to work together successfully, and where diverse support partners across education, workforce and economic development are syncing up their strengths, assets, weaknesses and gaps into a strong support team. Conveners are keeping industry engaged and motivated, and a cadence of regular meetings and projects starts to take hold. Another way to think about this is to envision the turning points in the development of a Partnership where real collaboration and buy-in begins to take hold. See the below graphic: Group Dynamics of Next Gen Sector Partnerships.

Group Dynamics of Next Gen Sector Partnerships





STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

STEP 1: BUILD YOUR REGIONAL SUPPORT TEAM & MAKE THE CASE FOR A NEW APPROACH

Launching a sector partnership often represents a break from tradition. It challenges the status quo, requires a much deeper level of business engagement, demands a much greater commitment to collaboration, and can deliver remarkable results. It does require that your team commits to a new approach to building partnerships with one another and industry.

Your first step in launching a sector partnership is making the case for a new approach among key partners in your region (workforce development, education and economic development). It's critical to get on the same page and prepare people for a very different kind of partnership, not just a tweak to existing efforts, before you are ready to engage industry. Those who answer the call for a new approach will become the core of your regional support team, responsible for making initial decisions about what industry sector(s) to target and clarifying roles and responsibilities among support partners, including who should serve as convener or co-convener.

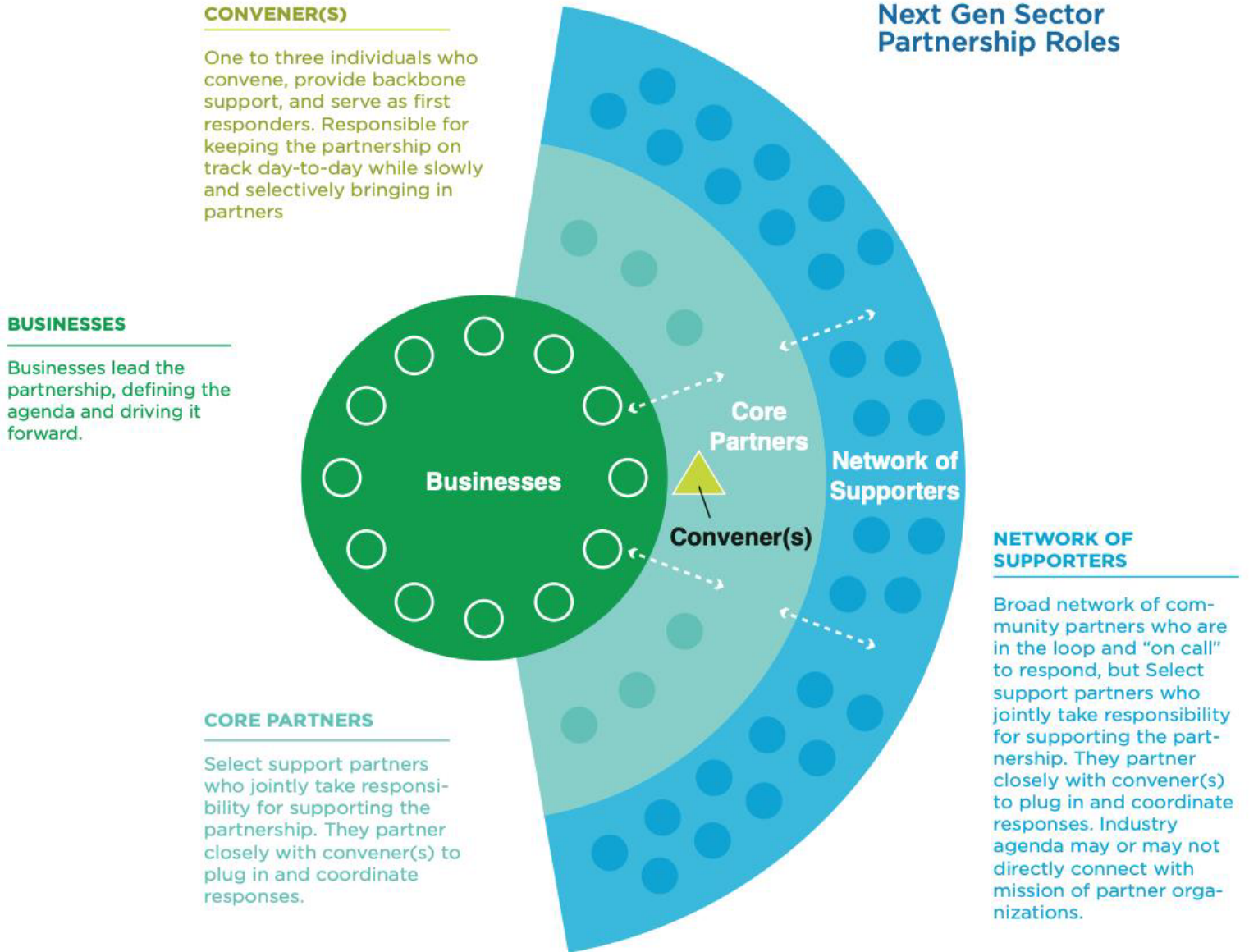
Over time, your support team will evolve to include more individuals and organizations. **Not all members of the support team will play the same role and roles will shift over time as the partnership evolves.** Consider three categories of roles of the support team for an active sector partnership:

- **Core Partners:** This is the team that will be directly responsible for launching and supporting the sector partnership. They are the individuals who answer the call for a new approach and who commit to using the Next Gen Sector Partnership methodology to build and sustain an authentically industry-led partnership. It's important that members of this team represent multiple education, workforce development and economic development organizations. This team will be responsible for brokering relationships with businesses to bring them to—and keep them at—the table. They will also be responsible for identifying partners from the broader network of supporters (other education, workforce development or economic development organizations) that can help implement industry's priorities. This team will also be responsible for making decisions about which organization (or pair of organizations) is best-positioned to serve as convener. Depending on the partnership priorities and needs partners are called to step in and out of “active” involvement.
- **Convener or Co-Convener:** The convener is seen as a neutral third-party who has credibility both with business leaders and with public partners. The convener helps to keep the partnership on track and focused by: 1) coordinating partnership meetings; 2) communicating with both business leaders and public partners, including keeping action-plans up-to-date; 3) connecting with new business leaders to engage them in the partnership and brokering connections with public partners to help with implementation, and; 4) providing facilitation to help business leaders develop and refine their shared agenda for action. See the [Convener Job Description](#) for more.
- **Network of Supporters:** This is the broad network of partners representing education (including K-12, Career and Technical Education, community and technical colleges), workforce development (workforce development boards, SC Works Centers, Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Education, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, etc.), economic development and other organizations (could include elected officials, organized labor, community-based organizations) who have a stake in supporting the targeted industry sector. While not all of these partners will play integral roles in the day-to-day operations of your sector partnership, it's important to engage them early, and continuously make the case that this is a new approach. Keep this network of stakeholders in the loop.

TOOLS

- [Universe of Connections Diagramming exercise + guiding discussion questions](#)
- [Building your Non-Industry Support Team – A Sample Work-Session](#)
- [Convener Job Description](#)
- [Talking Points to Recruit Public Partners](#)

Next Gen Sector Partnership Roles



After Action Review: Build Your Regional Support Team

1. Do key stakeholders in our region (from education, workforce development, and economic development) recognize how sector partnership(s) can act as the shared table where they can work with businesses from a targeted sector, understand their needs, and collaborate with other public partners to develop responsive/ coordinated solutions? Are we willing to agree on at least one target sector through which we can begin experimenting and operating via this shared table approach, vs. operating via multiple independent employer engagement efforts in the targeted sector in our region?
2. Have we agreed on clear roles and responsibilities on the sector support team? Who is the lead “convener”, or co-conveners?



STEP 2: DEFINE THE SCOPE OF INDUSTRY FOCUS

Once you have pulled together your support team, work together to look at regional labor market data to determine which sectors merit your collective action in launching a sector partnership. In other words, look for sectors that:

- Are drivers of your regional economy with a significant number of total jobs, higher-than-average wages, or a rate of concentration in your region that is higher than state or national averages;
- Are the targets of multiple employer engagement efforts in your region. Odds are that if multiple support partners are reaching out to businesses in a given sector, it's a sector that would benefit from a more coordinated approach.

Consider the following criteria when making decisions about which industries to target:

- **Overall employment:** How many jobs does the sector provide in your region? How does this compare to other industries?
- **Average wages:** Does the industry provide family-sustaining wages?
- **Projected growth:** Does the industry show signs of dynamism and growth? Industries that are in decline or contraction are not good candidates for sector partnerships.
- **Industry concentration or location quotient:** Concentration can give indication of specialization in your region's economy. Are there signs of unique competitive advantages or specialization in this sector in your region?

Keep in mind that data only provides one piece of the overall picture about the regional economy and has limitations. Your on-the-ground knowledge of the regional economy and business trends is equally valuable and important in informing the decision about the industry of choice.

As you determine the scope of your industry-led partnership, keep in mind the strong benefits of “working definitions.” A common pitfall at this early juncture can be paralysis by analysis, where the perfect becomes the enemy of the good. In other words, as you identify the sector or sectors as the focus for your efforts, remember that you are developing a working definition that is always evolving to some degree, especially at the margins. That goes for the specific industry segments that you target, and the geographic scope of your partnership.

After Action Review: Define the Scope of Industry Focus

1. Has our regional team jointly agreed on which industry sectors merit our collective action in launching a sector partnership? Did we use LMI data, combined with our on-the-ground knowledge about industries, to make these selections? Which sector is first? Or next?
2. Has our regional team discussed and agreed to the not-too-small, not-too-big geographic footprint for our sector partnership?

TOOLS

- [Getting the Scope Just Right](#)
- [How to Use LMI – Guideposts](#)
- [Sample Regional LMI Profiles for OR's Regions](#)
- [Industry Readiness worksheet](#)



STEP 3: PREPARE TO LAUNCH

Once you have assembled an initial core team of support partners jointly committed to the Next Gen approach and agreed on a target sector, you're ready to prepare for the launch. Here are four steps:

Discuss and agree which one organization, or pair of organizations, is well positioned to be the lead convener/co-convener of the new partnership. Who has credibility with companies in the target sector? Who can devote some staffing to this effort? Who can neutrally facilitate the partnership's process, leaving their own organizational agendas behind? (For example: Chambers or Associations must leave behind goals of increasing membership; colleges must leave behind goals of immediate curriculum advising; workforce investment areas must not immediately focus on how to increase their performance metrics). See the [Convener Job Description](#) for details on the skills required to be an effective convener or co-convener.

- 1. As a team, confirm that all other partners will be in a support role throughout the partnership's life,** and that they will be in "listening" mode during meetings with business leaders, "action" mode once implementation of priority areas and goals begins.
- 2. Start brainstorming and discussing who the companies and CEOs are in your region/ community.** Discuss who each support partner knows personally. Decide which top three CEOs might be best chairpersons for the partnership. These initial chairpersons will be responsible for signing the invitation letter and personally assisting with recruitment. Discuss and decide who will do outreach and recruitment for each. Remember you are not looking for representatives but senior executives who have decision-making authority and are passionate about their industry and community (See [How to Choose an Industry Champion](#))
- 3. Decide on the date, time and location.** Ask chairpersons what date and time will make the most sense for companies and suggest that the launch meeting be hosted at one of their facilities, which sends a clear message that this is an industry-owned effort. Draft an invitation letter and ask the chairpersons to personalize and sign it.. Get the invitations out with at least 4-6 weeks-notice and conduct follow up phone calls to make sure you get the critical mass you want at the Launch.

TOOLS

- [Prepare to Launch Worksheet](#)
- [How to Choose an Industry Champion](#)
- [Talking Points to Recruit Champions](#)
- [For Business Champions: How to Recruit Other Business Champions](#)
- [Sample launch invitation letter](#)

HOW MANY BUSINESSES SHOULD WE TARGET TO ATTEND THE LAUNCH MEETING?

There's no magic number and the ideal target will vary depending on the size of the industry and the size of your region. But, as a general rule, you want to have no less than 12 and, ideally, closer to 25 or 30. If your goal is to have 25 attend the launch, invite at least 100 to account for those who can't make it or who don't respond.

Remember to aim for quality over quantity. The goal is to have senior decision-makers (ideally C-Suite), not company representatives who can't make commitments on behalf of their companies. It's also important to target a diverse group of companies representing various sub-sectors of the industry, different sized companies, as well as diverse business leaders in terms of gender and race/ethnicity.

After Action Review: Prepare to Launch

1. Have we identified and successfully recruited at least two (3 or 4 even better!) CEOs in our region and target industry who will sign the invite letter and welcome everyone to the Launch?
2. Have we picked a date, time and location that will work for everyone (ideally locating the meeting at a business facility)?
3. Have we collectively created an invite list of C-level leaders of companies in our target sector and region to invite to the Launch? Did we get the invite out one month in advance, and do appropriate follow ups?



STEP 4: LAUNCH

There is no one right process to use in the Sector Partnership launch meeting. However, do spend time on this choice, and choreograph how it will play out. Choose a disciplined process that allows the collective industry voice to emerge and choose a good facilitator who can pull it off. This first meeting is the hook –business leaders must see a reason to commit to a next step.

Based on years of experience with many different processes, this curriculum offers a set of design criteria and a preferred approach. Whatever approach you choose, it should be designed to have business leaders identify opportunities for sector growth, priority requirements for capitalizing on these opportunities, and, most importantly, committed business champions for those priorities who are willing to take a next step after the launch meeting. Don't make the mistake of asking business leaders to discuss their needs without asking them to commit to developing solutions. It is essential that by the end of the meeting, there is a shared product (priority opportunities, requirements, and champions) that is the business leaders'--and not anyone else's--agenda. To this end, it is best if community partners are good listeners during this meeting, giving business champions the opportunity to be heard.

After Action Review: Launch

1. Did we engage a critical mass of business leaders at the launch meeting?
2. Did the launch meeting result in a set of shared priorities that business leaders feel a sense of ownership over?
3. Did business leaders commit to specific next steps after the meeting?
4. Did we make time for non-industry support partners to debrief after listening at the Launch meeting? Did we balance enthusiasm to jump in with solutions with the need to let industry-led action teams further define needs and early wins in the next 2-4 weeks?
5. Are we ready for next steps, including sending an executive summary of the meeting out to business members asap, and setting up short action team calls?

TOOLS

- [Suggested Meeting Setup](#)
- [Sample Launch Agenda](#)
- [Detailed Launch Facilitation Guide](#)



DOING IT THE NEXT GEN WAY

TOP TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE FACILITATION

Effective facilitators have the ability to harness the collective will power of a room and keep a group engaged and focused. Facilitate comes from the French word that means, “to make easy.” Your job as a facilitator is to make it as easy as possible for a group to work together, make decisions, and develop a shared plan of action. (This does not necessarily mean it will always be comfortable!)

- 1. Synthesize, don't summarize.** Your role as facilitator is to draw connections among individual ideas to help the group develop a *shared* vision and plan for action. Rather than just re-stating what you've heard from individuals, synthesize what you're hearing from the group overall.
- 2. You don't have to be the expert (in fact, it's best if you're not).** It's important that you know enough about the subject at hand to understand the terminology being used but not so much that you forget to ask clarifying questions. (Most of the time, if you have a question, others in the room do too!) Don't be afraid to speak up and ask basic questions to make sure everyone is on the same page and following the conversation.
- 3. Be neutral and make a point of showing it.** Make a point of establishing your neutrality early on. Demonstrate that your only job is to help the group move forward and stay on track. Throughout the discussion check your assumptions and ask for feedback repeatedly (“Am I hearing you correctly?” “I might have misunderstood—is this what you meant?” “Did I get this right?”). Make a point of showing that you are open to—in fact, depending on—feedback from the group to ensure you are moving the conversation in a productive direction. And, most importantly, remember that your job as facilitator is never to bring your own agenda. If you think you have an answer, ask a question.
- 4. Get comfortable with silence.** When a group is new to working together, it is entirely normal to have pauses in conversation, especially on a conference call. Resist the urge to fill all the space in the conversation. After asking a question of the group, allow for at least several seconds of silence before jumping in with a follow up (count to 10 if you need to!). This gives time for people to think and for quieter group members to join the conversation.
- 5. Have a clear goal in mind.** As a facilitator, you don't care about what the group decides but it is important that there are some decisions made. Begin the discussion by being clear about where you want the conversation to end up (next steps, action items, 60-day wins or deliverables etc.). Keep a close watch on time and ensure you get to those specific next steps or action items.
- 6. Energy: Bring it!** When a facilitator brings energy to a discussion, it signals that the topic is important and deserves the attention and focus of the group. Your body language and tone of voice matters. Even if you're facilitating over the phone, smile to convey a sense of positivity. Energy also helps engage the group; a high-energy facilitator keeps participants active and alert.
- 7. Plan, plan, plan...and then be flexible.** Effective facilitation requires careful planning and attention to detail. Is the room set up in a way that is conducive to discussion? Are materials ready to go (flip chart, plenty of markers, agendas printed etc.)? Have key members of the group (particularly business champions) been briefed on their roles? Has the invitation been sent out with plenty of advance notice? Has the purpose of the discussion been clearly communicated? From there, stay flexible as the discussion moves forward, allowing the group to lead.



STEP 5: MOVE TO ACTION: ORGANIZE THE AFTERMATH AND BEGIN IMPLEMENTATION

The priority opportunities and requirements you identified during the “launch” meeting are a starting place for an action plan: a strategy that lays out a clear set of goals, outcomes, and actions to advance the partnership’s shared priorities. To move from ideas to action, organize focused conversations (either in-person or over the phone) with business champions who volunteered for each priority area. Focus these smaller groups on defining success (e.g. “What are we trying to achieve? How will we know when we’re successful?”) and identifying any immediate opportunities for “quick wins” (e.g. “What can we accomplish in the next 60 days that will help advance this priority? How can we get started?”).

It is critical at this stage to ensure that business champions are committing to specific actions. Each Action Team of business champions should choose their own leaders, identify and commit to specific 60-day deliverables, and decide how and when they want to meet to keep the momentum going. They should also identify questions or any help they want from community partners at this stage. The conveners should act as facilitators for the Action Teams, as well as intermediaries for reaching out selectively to community partners for assistance.

Pay attention to which business people start to emerge as leaders in these conversations, showing particular passion or helping to focus the group and bring clarity to the discussion. These are the leaders you will want to carefully cultivate and may want to ask to be lead champions down the road.

There will be a tendency at this point for community partners, with the best of intentions, to take over and drive action, not wanting to impose on the businesses. While well-intentioned, this is a formula for failure. If community partners exert themselves too much, business leaders will begin to step back and disengage. At this critical moment, you need business champions to step up and own solutions. Community partners must give space for the business voice to emerge and solidify their engagement as partners, not customers. The best rule of thumb? Ask if business champions have questions for or want assistance from public partners rather than assume that they want and need that help now.

After Action Review: Move to Action

1. Have we established action teams around business’ priorities? Are action teams made up of businesses, with community partners brought in selectively for support?
2. Have we identified lead business champions who are taking an active role in transforming ideas into action?
3. Have we achieved clarity around outcomes and strategies in key areas for action?
4. Are community partners beginning to see where they can add value on key priorities? Is there a mechanism to begin engaging them in action team responses, while still ensuring that business champions continue to drive the agenda and set strategy?
5. Have we achieved any “quick wins”?
6. Do we have a date set for the next Full Partnership Quarterly meeting?

TOOLS

Building & Supporting Action Teams

- [Facilitation Guide for Meetings After the Launch](#)
- [Step-by-Step Process of Building Action Teams](#)
- [Guidance on Building and Sustaining Action Teams](#)
- [Sample Quarterly Meeting Agenda](#)
- [The Task Force Model](#)

Roles & Responsibilities

- [Job Description for Industry Champions](#)
- [Roles and Responsibilities of industry champions, broader industry partners, conveners, core support partners, and broader community partners](#)
- [Influence Mapping: Finding the Right People for the Right Roles](#)

Communications

- [Sample implementation plan](#)
- [Sample E-mails: What Works Well \(and Doesn’t\)](#)
- [For Business Champions: How to Collaborate Effectively with Public Partners](#)
- [How to Manage Business Volunteers](#)

For Business Champions

- [How to Collaborate Effectively with Public Partners](#)
- [How to Manage Business Volunteers](#)



DOING IT THE NEXT GEN WAY

TOP TIPS FOR EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING, COORDINATING & CONNECTING

Keep the partnership moving forward, organized and informed. Build relationships among business leaders and public partners to keep everyone engaged and contributing effectively.

- 1. Write e-mails that people want to read.** It's hard to overstate the importance of catchy and well-written e-mails. Make sure the subject line is clear and states the purpose of the email upfront. Be positive and upbeat and personalize the message wherever possible. (See [sample e-mails for top do's and don'ts](#))
- 2. Be prompt.** Everyone involved in your sector partnership is juggling competing demands and priorities. In order to keep the partnership top-of-mind, prompt follow up is critical. Send out meeting summaries and recaps of next steps within one week of partnership meetings or phone calls. Updates on partnership activities should go out regularly (at least every two months). Invitations to meetings should be sent with at least four weeks' notice, with regular reminders.
- 3. Follow through, follow through, follow through.** A successful sector partnership is the go-to place to get things done. Establishing your sector partnership as a productive and action-oriented forum is the most important factor that determines whether business people stay engaged or check out over time. Tight follow through on action items is key (following up on requests for information, holding meetings on a regular basis, reminding business leaders and public partners of their commitments and next steps in order to hold everyone accountable).
- 4. Doodle with caution.** Scheduling meetings is never as easy as it seems and Doodle can be a useful tool for coordinating the best dates and times. But use it sparingly and carefully! Offer a maximum of four options for dates and times to keep it simple and don't let the scheduling process drag on for more than a few days-schedules might fill up during that time! If you haven't heard from key people, pick up the phone and call them.
- 5. Focus on relationships, not representation.** Successful sector partnerships are all about people and relationships. Business leaders form friendships by working alongside one another and tackling common issues. Public partners build trust and rapport by collaborating to respond to industry needs. Conveners play a role creating the right conditions for these relationships to grow. As you work to populate Action Teams with the right business leaders and public partners, consider the team dynamics that will lead to strong relationships (not just the right representation of organizations and companies).
- 6. Strategically build relationships, identifying the decision-makers you need to reach and how to influence them.** A key to successful sector partnerships is leveraging relationships to make things happen. Identify the primary decision-makers needed to drive your work forward--who do you know well? If you don't know them, who might know them or be able to influence them? Proactively and diligently build connections with decision-makers and the influencers that know them that can move your partnership forward. See the ["influence mapping"](#) tool.
- 7. Be proactive in identifying roles for public partners.** They say that collaboration is an unnatural act. When people don't understand where they fit, they are likely to bring a random agenda to the table. Be proactive by helping partners understand how they can substantively contribute to the partnership's agenda. Identify specific ways that you think individual partners can be helpful and make the ask ("I see you playing a really valuable role in _____. Can you help with that?").



STEP 6: SUSTAIN AND EVOLVE

Long term success of an industry-driven partnership depends on many factors, but paramount is keeping businesses in the driver's seat. They must set and own the agenda. Other critical elements of sustainability that rise to the top include following through on actions, staying responsive to the business needs, continually finding the right staffing and support mix for coordination, and operating in the spirit of continuous improvement.

Let's consider that sustainability of your partnership (and hopefully multiple partnerships) depends on having a shared vision and commitment to multiple systems (workforce, education, and economic development at a minimum) working together. Independent systems must actively apply and coordinate independent resources in support of the business priorities. The end result is collective impact; the best Next Gen Sector Partnerships are posterchild examples of how *Collective Impact* principles can play out in a regional community.

After Action Review: Sustain and Evolve

1. Do key stakeholders involved understand the enduring value of our sector partnership?
 - a. *Companies* recognize the sector partnership as a place to address big opportunities for shared competitiveness, a single table at which to work with public entities, and an opportunity to share costs related to needed solutions;
 - b. *Educators* recognize the sector partnership as a venue for faster understanding of changing industry needs and a vehicle to build industry-driven career pathway systems;
 - c. *Workforce developers* recognize the sector partnership as a way to strategically focus time and resources toward high-impact solutions for industry and workers, a wholesale (vs. retail) approach to serving businesses, and a way to create highly customized and therefore highly accurate training solutions for businesses;
 - d. *Economic developers* recognize the sector partnership as a place for focused work with key industries, a meaningful venue for working with education and workforce development, and a tool to understand the strengths and opportunities of driving industry sectors.
2. Have we considered what organizational home is right for the partnership that ensures that the partnership continues to be industry-driven and action-oriented?
3. Have we developed a process for periodically assessing progress, revising priorities, and refreshing our partnership's agenda?

COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND SECTOR STRATEGIES

The 2011 Stanford Social Innovation Review article *Collective Impact* prescribes the approach to situations which “require many different players to change their behavior in order to solve a complex problem,” and where “a group of important actors” from diverse organizations must “abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach.”¹ Kania and Kramer identified five conditions for achieving collective impact on any issue: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and backbone support functions (such as convening partners, conducting needs assessments, developing a shared strategic plan for aligning efforts, selecting success metrics and designing an evaluation). These conditions mirror the same critical success factors of good sector partnerships. The unique advantage of the sector partnership approach, in the best cases, is that the common agenda is framed by an invested 3rd party: the voice of industry. When used effectively, this means that individual partner organizations who acknowledge and embrace using the “pull” of industry demand to guide their services to workers and jobseekers can almost immediately find projects to collaborate on, and can significantly reduce ramp-up time involved with complex mission alignment.

Woolsey, Lindsey. 2015. “Applying ‘Next Generation’ Business Engagement Practices to Opportunity Youth, Pew Charitable Trusts

TOOLS

- [Red Flags and Green Lights](#)
- [Sustainability Self Assessment](#)
- [Five Approaches for Sustainable Staffing & Funding Considerations Worksheet](#)
- [Organizational Shifts to Sustain Sector Partnerships](#)
- [Aspen Institute’s Asset Spiral](#)
- [Developing Leaders, Building a Movement](#)

Module 2



Module 2: Coordinating Business Services & Outreach

The best Next Gen Sector Partnerships succeed because their conveners and support partners operate on an assumption that they will get more bang for their public dollar buck if they coordinate together to engage with their most critical industry sectors, and then in response coordinate to ensure that industry and jobseekers in the community get what they need. It should be obvious that the first half of this equation is coordinated outreach to businesses. It should therefore also be noted that any efforts to coordinate or streamline business outreach in an area should *not be done in isolation of sector partnership efforts, nor vice versa*.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Most states and local areas face two persistent challenges in their industry engagement efforts:

- 1. Incomplete Information:** Outreach to industry done independently *never* achieves true understanding of a labor market region's industry needs. Without some level of critical mass engagement of companies/businesses in a target sector, *the information received about their skills needs is incomplete*. No single organization acting on their own can achieve critical mass engagement or input. Surveys and focus groups are not enough, and leave education and training entities with a narrow slice of needed information.
- 2. Messy, Redundant and Burdensome Outreach:** Outreach to industry done independently is messy. Why? Because everyone is doing it. Multiple points of contact are made with businesses from each organization. Universities, colleges, and career tech education advisory boards/committees conduct their own outreach and engagement. Economic development organizations at the regional, city, county levels have their own reasons for outreach. And within the Workforce system, at least a half dozen individual programs have business outreach or business service functions. Why are they all doing this separately? Because each organization and program has a slightly *different reason* for engagement (based on slightly different target population missions, performance criteria, etc). Redundancy, however, is a reality. And the additional risk is business fatigue. In every community, dozens of entities are asking businesses about their needs, or requesting input or sponsorship of some sort. The same companies tend to get hit multiple times; most companies get only part of what they need in piecemeal fashion; and no program ever builds a critical mass of companies. This is the challenge inherent in the "many tables and many knocks" approach in which most regions operate (see the [Many Tables, Many Knocks](#) exercise).

RESPONSE AND CRITICAL DECISIONS

Some areas, states and economic regions are already thinking hard about how to coordinate and streamline the many tables (where businesses may already be convened as a group) or at least points of contact (the "many knocks") with businesses. Your sector partnerships should not be excluded or parallel to these conversations and processes, but integrated into them. How will this occur? Consider these three general categories and questions for moving this conversation in the right direction:

TOOLS

- [Journey Mapping Group Exercise](#)
 1. Discuss: What's the employer experience with our programs? What do employers say about us?
 2. As individual program leaders, take 5-10 minutes to write down or draw the path a business person takes when working with your program (i.e. point of engagement, referrals, follow-through, etc), and clearly state what services employers receive.
 3. Discuss: individual paths, strong and weak points, points of redundancy, if any.
- [Many Tables, Many Knocks exercise](#)



1. **Outreach Coordination and Consistent Methodology:** Do businesses know what to expect when engaging with any one of our programs? Do we have a shared vision and criterion for high quality business services? Is there really such a thing as a single Point of Contact? If not, what gets us closer to the benefits of a single POC? How do we move toward consistent, high quality, shared methodologies in services (e.g. OJT services, customized training services, job candidate recruitment & assessment services, etc)? Do we use the same terms and job descriptions for *business service reps, job developers, business outreach specialists, etc?*

2. **Shared Marketing or Common Branding:** Do we have shared goals and methodologies that we can message and market to businesses? Have we mapped and assessed our individual business service strengths? How can we at least begin that process, and apply it to shared marketing/referral protocol? Can we jointly use testimony of business relationships that have been successful to market our services? How do we do that as a unified front, vs. independent (confusing) entities? Can we create a shared marketing plan?

3. **Staff Development:** How have we already improved in this area? Do we hire for the same qualities and skills across any of our business outreach positions? Do we reward coordination across staff performing these functions across programs and agencies? Do we expect joint accountability and outcomes across them? How can we scale up consistent, like-minded training for business outreach staff across our organizations? How do we ensure that staff directly providing services to jobseekers and students are fully connected to business outreach staff, so the final product (qualified job applicants) matches business service promises?

Now consider: Where does your sector partnership (or future partnerships) fit in? What is their potential role for bringing coordination to your disparate business outreach services, or how do you bring your existing business outreach coordination efforts into play to benefit your sector partnership(s)?

Your Sector Partnership Regional Support Team:

- Workforce Development Board, Job Center
- Community/Tech Colleges
- Adult Education
- K-12 Education
- Economic Development/ Chambers
- other

The Multiple Workforce Programs conducting outreach to Businesses:

- Veterans
- Older Workers
- Youth
- Voc Rehab
- Employment Department
- Temporary Assistance to Need Families
- other

The Many other Organizations also conducting outreach to Businesses:

- City, county, regional economic development organizations
- City, county, regional Chambers
- City, County government
- Universities
- Private k-12, private post-secondary
- other

Module 3



Module 3: Serving Jobseekers and Students on the Frontline

A general agreement from the decades of practice nationally in the field of sector strategies is that business engagement tactics may actually *not* change dramatically depending on the target population. This may sound counterintuitive, but fundamentally, regardless of the particular job-seeker, a deep understanding of demand remains the most important factor to placing any individual into training, an education program, and eventually into a job.

THE CORE STRATEGY: ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING OF INDUSTRY DEMAND

For any target population, engaging employers authentically in order to understand *demand* is still the core strategy. Over-reliance on “push” tactics to move particular target population individuals into the labor market cannot compete with using the market’s “pull” to appropriately and adequately train, prepare and place people into jobs (i.e. a sector strategy). For some target populations, what changes the most from other populations is the type, level and duration of training and preparation to make them ultimately qualified and valuable the first day on the job. Some need “longer runways and stronger pathways”¹ along the full continuum of support on the way to a job. This is where the expertise of organizations whose mission it is to serve hard-to-serve populations should come into play.

Continuum of Participant Support



Regardless of type of jobseekers, everyone needs to be provided accurate, clear and realistic information about job choices, job market saturation levels, entry and advanced wage levels, needed skills and abilities to perform well, and advancement opportunities and timeframes. This requires service providers to understand demand at a complex level, and to continually check and update their understanding. A sector partnership is an effective mechanism to do this, but one that requires practice.

Simply put, we will serve all jobseekers better through demand-driven approaches. The key is figuring out how the flow of information and strategic direction provided by the demand side flows directly into the hands of frontline staff working with individual jobseekers.

TOOLS

- [Journey Mapping Group Exercise](#)
 1. Discuss: What’s the experience of our jobseekers and students with our programs? What do they say about our programs?
 2. As individual program leaders, take 5-10 minutes to write down or draw the path a person takes when accessing your services (i.e. point of engagement, referrals, follow-through, etc), and clearly state what they receive.
 3. Discuss as a group: individual paths, strong and weak points, points of connection, missed connections, if any.
- [Mapping the Frontline exercise](#) As a regional team, map this out: Who are frontline staff, who directly serves jobseekers/ students in our system? What do they each do? Who do they serve? Where do they overlap or connect?
- [Group Brainstorm](#)
- [Draw Your Own Communication Strategy](#)
- [Aspen’s Worker Constituency Worksheet:](#)

¹Fischer, D. *Innovations in the Field, Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project, JobsFirst NYC*, September 2014.

Module 4



Module 4: Connecting Industry-led Partnerships to Career Pathway Systems

Whether you're in K-12 education, workforce development, or higher education, you may have a slightly different definition of "career pathways." But no matter where you sit, you'll agree that **career pathways are about connecting people to jobs**. So what does it take?

- **Education and training providers need to have their finger on their pulse of what business needs.** Educators and workforce developers must stay deeply and finely attuned to the needs of the regional labor market. This means they need to have ongoing conversations with businesses about what specific skills and experiences are in-demand. And not just a handful of businesses. To accurately understand what skills are needed, educators need to hear from a *critical mass* of business leaders that represent the industry as a whole. Labor market data alone is not enough. There is no substitute for real, high-quality and ongoing conversations with business leaders.
- **Students and jobseekers need be able to advance seamlessly through education and training programs.** For decades the "cafeteria style" approach to higher education has emphasized student choice; students have their pick of a range of courses and credits but limited guidance on how to structure a course of study that leads to a credential or career. The problem is that many students get lost along the way, earning credits that don't add up to a credential with labor market value.²

This problem—too many choices and too little structure—is compounded when you consider the myriad of options every student has for training programs.

In every region there are high school career technical education programs, multiple community and technical colleges, four-year institutions, private training providers, short-term workforce training organizations, and others, all promising a pathway to jobs and careers. With so many options, how do students find the most direct path to a career? How do they navigate their way through multiple institutions without hitting a "dead end," like credits that won't transfer or a credential that employers don't recognize?

Career pathway programs offer part of the solution. By providing a clear sequence of stackable credits and credentials, along with support services, career pathway programs help students advance to higher levels of education and training within a single institution.

A career pathway system builds on career pathway programs, connecting multiple education, training, and service providers to give students and jobseekers a seamless sequence of courses, credits and credentials that lead to jobs and careers. Career pathway systems include: 1) strong advising and support services to help students navigate among and between education and training institutions to find the most direct path to a career; 2) articulation agreements among educational institutions so that credits transfer seamlessly, and; 3) high-quality work-based learning to prepare students with real-world experiences. And, most importantly, career pathway systems are organized around the real needs of business and industry so that students and jobseekers get the right skills to succeed in careers.

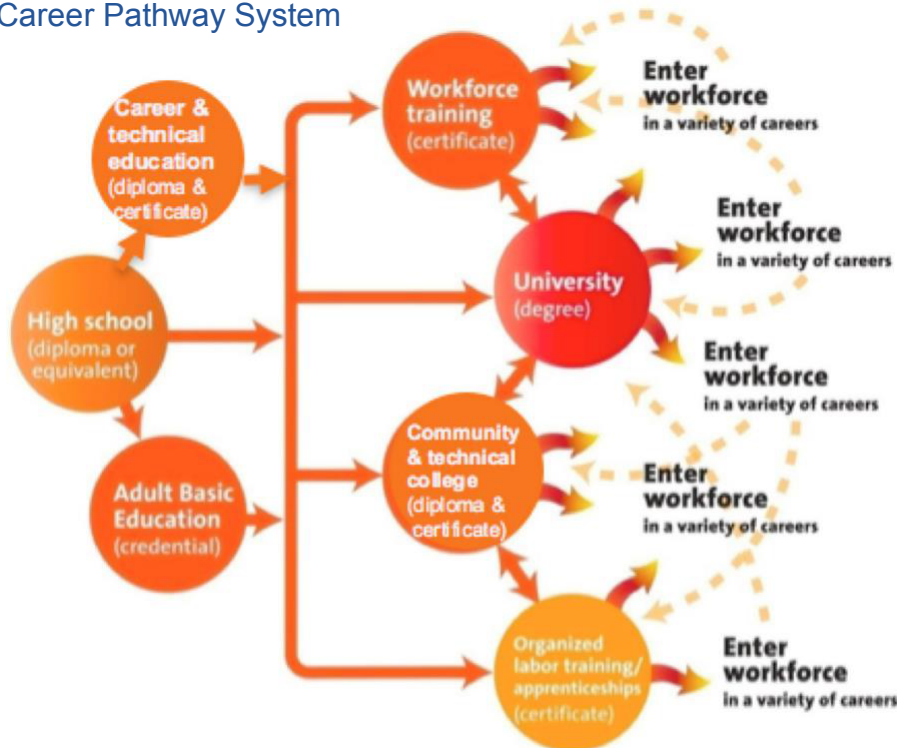
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEM AND CAREER PATHWAY PROGRAM?

Career pathway programs help students build industry-relevant skills, certifications and credentials and advance *within a single institution*. They combine a sequence of stackable credits and credentials with support services to help students successfully advance to higher levels of education and employment in high-demand occupations. A career pathway system, on the other hand, is made up of multiple career pathway programs that span multiple educational institutions, workforce and support service partners. These programs are all oriented around a shared understanding of the needs of industry.

² Bailey, T. R., Smith Jaggars, S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

A career pathway system aligns education and training programs with the needs of industry, providing clear sequences of stackable credits and credentials across multiple institutions that enable students and jobseekers to advance in careers in the targeted industry. Career pathway systems emerge out of two ongoing conversations: one with employers in the target industry and one with education and training providers who are responsible for developing and implementing programs. Sound familiar? It should. Sector Partnerships are the vehicle for integrating these two conversations.

Career Pathway System



After being in the workforce, a person may choose to go back for more credentials to make an upward or lateral career move.

Keep in mind that these distinctions are not hard and fast. There are likely examples in your community that fall somewhere in between these definitions of career pathway programs and systems. The key is to remember that career pathway systems-building is an ongoing, iterative process. Regardless of where your starting place is, the key questions are:

- How do we ensure our career pathways are grounded in an accurate, real-time understanding of what industry needs?
- How do we ensure education and training providers are coordinated and aligned so that students and jobseekers can seamlessly advance into jobs and careers? Every education and training organization has a distinct choice of operating in a “closed systems” or an open & connected system. The former can be easier to manage and control, but the latter reflects the actual needs of students and jobseekers, who cannot be assured otherwise that the program or door they walk into is the one that will provide a true path to a job or career.

Sector partnerships can help answer both questions.

Career Pathway Program

Connects courses, credits, credentials, support services and work-based experiences within **one** institution

Prepares students and jobseekers for a **single occupation**

Developed **independently** by institutions using program-specific employer advisory groups

Career Pathway System

Connects courses, credits, credentials, support services and work-based experiences across **multiple** institutions

Prepares students and jobseekers for **multiple occupations** in a targeted industry

Developed **collectively** by multiple education and training providers in partnership with employers from the targeted industry in order to **align overall supply and demand of skilled workers** in the targeted industry



WHY ARE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS THE “HOME” FOR CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEMS-BUILDING?

First, career pathway systems must be grounded in an accurate understanding of what industry needs. That requires sustained industry commitment to ongoing conversations with educators about what skills are in-demand and how best to prepare students and jobseekers with those skills. Sustained industry commitment only happens if you let businesses lead. Don't make the mistake of asking for business leaders' time to just talk about their workforce needs or just asking them for input on your programs. Business people have multiple needs and will only stay engaged for the long term if THEY define the agenda. Your sector partnership is an effective and sustainable vehicle to meet their multiple needs, including (but not limited) to building a talent pipeline).

Second, career pathway systems require coordination among multiple education and training providers. Since sector partnerships act as the “shared table” where multiple education, workforce development, and community-based organizations work together to respond to industry needs, they are a forum for coordinating across institutions to ensure that, collectively, workforce supply is meeting workforce demand. Sector partnerships engage public partners and industry leaders in a continuous dialogue to ensure that the education and training system is aligned and responsive to industry needs.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD INDUSTRY-DRIVEN CAREER PATHWAY SYSTEMS?

The starting place is building a strong and authentically industry-driven sector partnership. The step-by-step process outlined in this Toolkit is the key foundation for building career pathway systems. So what are you waiting for? Start building your sector partnerships now. They will become the platform for connected career pathway system building.

THE WIOA DEFINITION OF A CAREER PATHWAY REFERS TO A CAREER PATHWAY PROGRAM:

“A combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services.” WIOA also tasks Local Workforce Development Boards with facilitating the development of career pathway systems: “The vision for the Local Workforce Development Board (Local Board) is to serve as a strategic leader and convener of local workforce development system stakeholders.” (Notice of Proposed Rulemaking §679.300). “The local board, with representatives of secondary and postsecondary education programs, shall lead efforts in the local area to develop and implement career pathways within the local area by aligning the employment, training, education, and supportive services that are needed by adults and youth, particularly individuals with barriers to employment. (WIOA, Sec. 107(d)).”

TOOLS

- [Colorado's Step-by-Step Guide to Building Industry-Driven Career Pathway Systems](#)
- [Career Pathways Toolkit Created by US DOL](#)

AN INSPIRED VISION:

Harness industry-led sector partnerships to build and improve real industry-driven career pathway systems, giving business the talent they need now and in the future, and giving students and jobseekers real choices, clear paths and real “currency” in the labor market.

Module 5

Module 5: Success Metrics of Next Gen Sector Partnerships

Every sector partnership has an obligation to measure its own success and share its outcomes and results with its business and support organization partners. Business partners donate time and financial investments. They need to know what results from their efforts. Support partners (often reliant on public resources for their operations) re-purpose staff, leverage resources and internal expertise, and contribute their own credibility to partnerships. They too must know the return on their investment.

“I participate because it grows my business. Since getting involved in organized efforts like this, I’ve grown my business 500-600 percent. I tell all my manufacturing peers and competitors to join: two hours working on your industry will only help your business.”

— GRADY COPES, CEO, REATA ENGINEERING, METRO MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP, DENVER, CO

“The sector partnership approach is the most productive way to align the assets in your community toward a common goal and common business solutions. You will not get this working one-on-one with individual companies. The people at the table are the industry leaders and they best know their opportunities for growth, whether it is a workforce issue or a regulatory issue or an operational issue. They are the best ones to sit and discuss it.”

— JEN MILES, MOHAVE COUNTY WORKFORCE

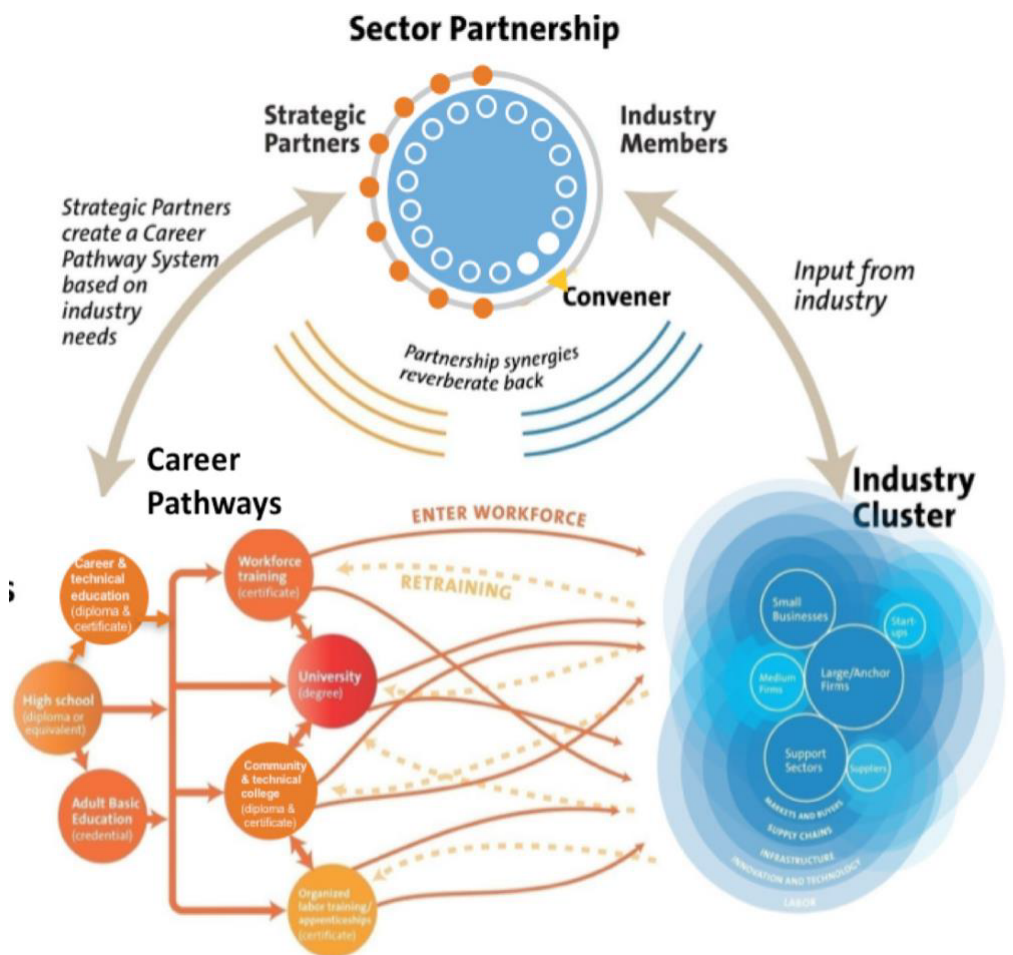
DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, AZ

Because sector partnerships are designed to stabilize and grow a target industry sector in a labor market region and designed to ensure jobseekers and students in that community are qualified to access its jobs, *every sector partnership must find ways to measure its impact on the business community and the target industry more broadly, as well as on jobseeker and students.*

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Sector Partnerships as keystones to Economic Growth and Career Pathway Systems-Building.

Consider in this module how sector partnerships act as a vehicle for harnessing the power of industry in a regional economy in order to accurately inform the education and training offerings to that economy’s workers, jobseekers and students. Consider too that the very act of convening businesses drawn from a target industry cluster in a region has powerful repercussions on that cluster’s growth. When businesses connect and interact, they innovate. New markets, new products, new joint ventures result. That’s economic growth. Do not therefore underestimate the value of a well-run sector partnership on growing your region’s economy, *and* on truly building a connected career pathway system that connects people to good jobs.





CATEGORIES OF MEASUREMENT

Next Generation sector partnerships measure success across three categories of metrics: 1) Impact on Business and Industry; 2) Impact on Jobseekers/Students; and 3) Impact on use of Public Programs/Resources. They also distinguish between *process metrics* and *impact metrics*. Here's a way to think about these:

	Impact on Business/ Industry	Impact on Jobseekers/ Students	Impact on Public Programs/ Resources
Sample Process Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breadth of Business Engagement (#s) Company referral rates Levels of in-kind/\$ investment by Biz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New or revised training programs Increased work experience openings Direct engagement of industry in curriculum development and teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared staffing across organizations Joint projects/grants supporting sector partnership
Sample Impact Metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased joint ventures, new products, ideas Improved access to skilled workforce Improved internal HR or other operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced time-to-hire upon graduation Increased rates of retention and advancement post-hire Increased earnings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of shared funding streams Evidence of joint accountability/ shared outcomes

TOOLS

- [More testimonials](#)
- [Introductory PowerPoint on Sector Partnership Metrics](#)
- [Colorado's 2016 Key Performance Indicator Survey sample](#)
- [25 Ways to Tell Your Sector Partnership Story](#)

STATEWIDE RESULTS

At-Scale Results

Where states have adopted strategies that help create strong, local sector partnerships, results are magnified. In Colorado:

BUSINESSES

82% of partnerships have businesses that have developed new or enhanced ideas for new products and/or markets

91% of partnerships have businesses that have found support in finding employees with the skills and experiences their business needs

82% of partnerships have businesses that have developed new recruitment practices

STUDENTS AND JOBSEEKER

71% of partnerships increased student/jobseeker awareness of training/education programs.

62% of partnerships experienced increased program alignment across secondary, post-secondary, and/or workforce programming.

67% of partnerships enhanced existing or developed new training/education program(s).



Over 20 sector partnerships spanning all 14 economic development regions of the state.

Module 6



Module 6: State Roles and Responsibilities for Next Gen Success

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Currently most states are, in some way, promoting implementation of local sector partnerships across their unique regional economies. About a dozen are specifically promoting the model of Next Gen Sector Partnerships. Their goals are similar: to create the best conditions for local sector partnerships to stabilize and grow critical industry sectors, and to connect students and workers to good jobs. This module outlines the history of state-supported sector partnership efforts, explains why Next Gen Sector Partnerships are a natural point of evolution for policy and program alignment with economic development, and outlines the most important roles that a state must play to create the ideal conditions for success.

HISTORY OF STATE-SUPPORTED SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

EARLY HISTORY OF SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

In the early 1980s there was a growing recognition that businesses and industry needed to be at the table to inform workforce development strategies. Several states and local areas pioneered this work.

Massachusetts began its sector work in 1981 by creating the Bay State Skills Corporation, funding local initiatives across the state in almost every critical industry and requiring 50 percent matching contributions from employers. The state has continued direct support of the “sector” or workforce partnership approach since then, funding hundreds of local partnerships through the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund.

By the early 2000s other states, such as **Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Pennsylvania** and **Washington** were following Massachusetts’ lead, creating grant programs to support the start-up of sector partnerships. Terms and labels for these efforts differed slightly, and included “sector partnership,” “sector initiative,” “workforce partnership,” “skills alliance,” “industry partnership,” “skill panel”, and others. The concepts were largely the same: engage businesses in a common industry sector to inform workforce development training. These states used a mix of policy tools in addition to grants to support this work, including high-quality labor market information to help local stakeholders make wise decisions about target industries; some training and shared learning opportunities across conveners of local sector partnerships; and early guidance on metrics.

By the mid-2000’s a handful of others joined the ranks as states promoting the use of sector partnerships to connect workforce training and education with business needs. These included **Minnesota, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Colorado** and **Kentucky**. Meanwhile **California** was promoting a concept and practice called the Regional Industry Clusters of Opportunity (RICO) initiative, which, in part, became the foundation for the model Next Gen Sector Partnerships we know today. RICO made a deliberate effort to bring businesses in like sectors together not just to inform workforce programs, but to create actual business leadership groups that self-activated around common priorities. In 2010, at the end of a four-year state sector strategy project conducted by the National Governors Association, more than 25 states were at various stages of similarly promoting sector or industry partnership development.

THE BEGINNINGS OF NEXT GEN SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

In 2011, some states started to experiment with new approaches to this work, including moving away from relying on grants to catalyze the start-up of partnerships. This was, in part, by necessity and part a result of growing recognition that partnerships were fizzling away when grant dollars disappeared.

Colorado and **Arizona** were two states where these lessons fueled experimentation with a unique approach. Instead of relying on grants, these states aggressively started to provide sector partnership technical assistance and training to



local workforce boards, as well as essential local partners in colleges and economic development organizations. They recognized that sustainable partnerships meant training and preparing their local and regional public (or support) organizations in a new way of working together. They broke ground on effectively standing up dozens of active sector partnerships and an equal number of emerging ones, none of which started with grants, but instead out of a recognized need by all program partners to align their industry engagement efforts and worker advancement programs into a formal coordinated partnership.

WHY STATES MOVED AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL SECTOR PARTNERSHIP GRANT PROGRAMS:

- **Necessity:** Most state sector partnership efforts have been and continue to be driven out of state workforce development agencies and/or State Workforce Investment Boards (mandated by WIA and now by WIOA). Many states used their WIA Governors' Discretionary money (a 15 percent WIA set-aside for state driven priorities and projects) to create sector partnership startup grants. In 2011 Congress reduced these funds from 15 percent to 5 percent. With this cut, many states pulled back significantly on state-supported sector partnership activity.
- **Sustainability:** States recognized the critical importance of their local and regional partners (workforce development, economic development, and education) working in coordination to engage and partner with business and industry. A coordinated approach (i.e. Next Gen) simply lessened the burden on businesses and streamlined otherwise disparate and resource-intensive business outreach efforts. Experience also points to deeper, broader and more sustained engagement by business partners if they are encouraged to focus on their bigger agendas, inclusive of but not exclusive to workforce issues.

A key lesson of the Next Gen Sector Partnership movement is the critical integration of workforce, education and economic goals at the local and regional level. **Next Gen Sector Partnerships are best described as the marriage between what we know works from decades of traditional workforce sector partnerships and what we know works from economic cluster partnerships of the eighties and nineties.** The model has grown significantly since 2012. Today Next Gen Sector Partnerships operate locally or regionally in many states, including **Arizona, California, Colorado, Oregon, Montana, Wyoming, Texas, Nebraska, North Carolina, Louisiana, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania**, with emerging interest from a half dozen others. Some states play key roles in making these local partnerships successful. The next section describes those roles in more depth.

SECTOR STRATEGIES AND SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Sector strategies are actions, policies and strategies that enable support partners to directly respond to industry-driven priorities. Sector partnerships are the organizing vehicle to ensure these strategies are effective, via the process of understanding businesses' collective needs and implementing joint solutions.

MOST IMPORTANT ROLES OF THE STATE – TIPS AND TOOLS

For decades, state policy and agency leaders have wrestled with their role in sector partnership development. This is understandable considering sector partnerships are not statewide partnerships; they are local (or "regional" based on an industry's true labor market). For state leaders to successfully support local/regional sector partnerships, the balance must be struck between "condition-setting" and "mandate-setting".

Before digging into the specifics, here are three critical guideposts from state leaders currently engaged in Next Gen sector partnership promotion.



- **Set yourself up for success over the long haul, including the ability to withstand political turnover.** Next Gen Sector Partnerships are not about a flashy new initiative and may not survive if they are sold as one. Instead, do just the right amount of promoting and selling, and then proactively work to integrate Next Gen Sector Partnerships into the everyday work of local practitioners and state system leaders.
- **Get ahead of the work by working across agency walls to identify where there will be push-back to implementation, both based on real barriers and perceived barriers.** It is not atypical to get a full year into Next Gen implementation only to suddenly hear from local public partners that they “can’t do this work” because of a policy barrier (usually perceived, but sometimes real) in their federal or state rules and mandates.
- **Stay on course with the actual building of your state’s local/regional sector partnerships, despite the constant flood of new (or simply re-labeled) national and statewide trends and big initiatives.** The upsweep nationally of “career connected or work-based learning” and apprenticeships are two great current examples. It is your job as a state leader to make sense of what is competing and what is compatible, and then help local practitioners do the same. Most importantly, consider that your local sector partnerships are the “brick and mortar”: the sustained mechanism to be able to appropriately integrate big initiatives and strategies into what local industry and jobseekers really need.

NINE NEEDED ACTIONS FOR STATES

1. **Shared vision and goals:** A joint vision from state leadership across workforce development, education, and economic development is important for two reasons: 1) it ensures that leaders are driving towards a unified and strategic vision and 2) sets the tone for regional partnership development. It is simply not enough for one agency or system to push an agenda forward. Leaders from across agencies play a key role in creating a shared vision focused on serving and positively impacting a state’s economy and workers/job-seekers, and in offering the suggested mechanism to make it happen. Do not underestimate the importance of harnessing the voice and influence of a visible and credible leader at the state level to take on the role of consistent and persistent messaging about Next Gen Sector Partnerships. This may be a deputy director at the State Workforce Development Board or at an economic development agency, a Chancellor of a community college system, the Governor (or ideally all of the above.)

How do multiple agencies make this happen? Here are some ideas:

- [Oregon signed a joint charter](#) across its agency directors, jointly committing to training and scaling up local industry partnerships.
 - [Pennsylvania signed a joint letter](#) to on-the-ground leadership in regions.
2. **Good industry data and analysis:** A state can play a strong role in culling through multiple sources and layers of data and organizing data into usable tools for local areas to make informed decisions about target industries. Ideally, these tools should be designed for use by multiple regional stakeholders (a “team”) so that they reach joint decisions about critical industries in their regions. This starts a critical, early buy-in process by multiple organizations about shared target sectors. It is critical that the data is organized by industry sectors or clusters, not by occupational groupings. Local and regional stakeholders need to know which sectors really drive their local economies in order to select viable sectors for a Next Gen partnership. Data must also be organized in a way that users can discover the true geographic footprint of a labor market. This means avoiding strict county or workforce area boundaries, making economic development regions a good choice for organizing data. As a compatible tool, help regional/local teams go through an exercise together to make choices about target industries (see [Labor Market Information Review worksheet](#)).
 3. **Performance metrics tools:** Some Next Gen states are creating a common dashboard of success indicators, a set of criteria for high performing partnerships, and associated metrics tools to create consistency across sector partnerships. It’s very important to be clear about how these are intended to be used. Because most Next Gen Sector Partnerships exist without grant money, the state must be cautious about mandating performance metrics. They can, however, provide a toolkit of metrics and suggested indicators that help individual sector partnerships tell their own story effectively. Some states are then able to collect just a handful of consistent metrics from across their partnerships in order to show statewide impact (see [Oregon’s metrics memo](#)). It is also important that metrics collect qualitative stories from the field about what is working. At the end of the day metrics are a key tool for backing up



your shared state vision and are critical to use in communication. [Here is one sample of a starting place](#) for building out a metric framework that supports a shared state vision.

4. **Training and capacity building:** This is technical assistance. The state plays a significant role in providing training and support to local area stakeholders to develop, launch and expand their sector partnerships. This may be the most powerful tool in the state toolkit. To be successful, technical assistance must be coupled with messaging about the shared vision (i.e. why the state is pursuing Next Gen) and must be clear about who receives technical assistance. Remember that no assumptions should be made about which kind of organization is best positioned to convene a partnership; it depends completely on the influence, credibility and capacity of that organization. This may be a chamber, a workforce board, a college or a community-based organization. Technical assistance therefore must go to regions or local areas comprehensively.
5. **Building the True Network of Partnerships:** One of the most effective and efficient roles a state can play is simply being the mechanism for cross-partnership sharing. There is enormous value in partnership leaders being able to talk together about challenges and successes, work through barriers and discuss promising approaches. Next Gen Sector Partnerships ultimately are about shifting how individuals and organizations work together. That cannot happen in bubbles. The state can convene monthly sharing calls, annual Next Gen summits or academies, create quarterly [newsletters](#), and make one-on-one connections among partnership leaders. **Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Texas, Hawaii, and Oregon** have all implemented a combination of these sharing tactics in recent years.
6. **State-Regional Communication:** Creating the feedback loop between local areas and state systems about lessons learned, insights about industry and worker needs, and needed changes going forward in policies and investments is an important role of the state. No one else can play this role, and it is a critical piece of the practice-to-policy-to-practice loop. For example, if a state has six active manufacturing partnerships, each will be highly unique. But they all will also have a few common needs and insights, which should bubble up to a statewide level and potentially uncover needed policy changes or ideas to leverage. States also have opportunities to connect others together for shared learning and identification of common needs, including their colleges involved in sector partnerships, or their workforce or economic development boards.
7. **Communication and awareness:** “Building the buzz” about the value of sector partnerships, and actively recruiting champions from public systems and the private sector doesn’t just happen at the local partnership level. State leadership can help by communicating the value of the sector partnership approach to industry associations, agency leaders, and individual private sector members. Another critical communication component is messaging up the ranks and down to the practitioners on the ground that these partnerships take time to build and to show results. Active communication and sharing of best practices and lessons learned with local and regional partnerships goes a long way in capitalizing on the momentum of individual partnerships and creating positive environment for broad adoption of the Next Gen partnerships. Strong state leadership requires sending a balanced message of the vision and hoped-for outcomes with the reality of building and sustaining a partnership ([see this video of Wyoming Governor Mead speaking at their Next Gen Academy](#)). Some states, including Oregon, Wyoming and Colorado, have state maps identifying regional sector partnerships in order to spread a clear message that these are regional and industry-specific.
8. **Changes to administrative and legislative policies:** On an ongoing basis, state agencies jointly need to assess if there are policy barriers that are hindering the establishment and progress of sector partnerships, or if there are ways to create policies that will better support partnership development. Sometimes these changes are easy to make administratively, and yield big impact. For example, can the language and vision of Next Gen Sector Partnerships be integrated into new or extended grants and contracts? What about into existing program policies? Is there an opportunity to re-configure workforce boards and committees to add in more rigorous focus on cross-system alignment and sector partnership-building? Is there needed legislation to codify sector partnerships as the vehicle for cross-system collaboration and business engagement ([see an example of legislation from Colorado](#)). Could legislation help push the development of career pathway programs in education to be more aligned with the needs of industry?



Sector partnerships ideally are the common ground, the actual table of businesses in a target sector that should be informing career pathway programming.

- 9. Funding and investments:** The state plays a vital role in mapping out funding sources, re-purposing funding streams, and finding new funding that can support the important industry-driven solutions that come out of sector partnerships. To be clear, standard procedure for Next Gen Sector Partnerships has been to avoid start-up or implementation grants. This comes on the tail of many years and lessons learned of partnerships forming *because* of money, and therefore not sustaining over time. States, however, can play important roles in capacity support for conveners and support teams as well as incentive funding for actual projects and activities *after* a successful partnership has come together authentically.

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